

This Is How We Change The World Devotional

We, at Crossroads, love to gather and worship God in a crowd, but we also know that to really get to know God, we have to withdraw and spend time alone in His Word. That's why we practice "daily digging" in the Bible. Proverbs 2:4 says, "Search for them (God's principles) as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures."

As we open the Scriptures, the goal is to "dig until you hit something that hits you" or in other words, we read until we run into something that relates to our lives.

Here are a few digging tips:

1. Pray before beginning.
2. Read the Bible slowly and meditatively.
3. Pay attention to context (what's going on before and after the text you're reading).
4. In seeking to apply the verse/passage to your life, ask 4 questions:
 - Is there a sin to avoid?
 - Is there an example to follow?
 - Is there a promise to claim?
 - Is there a command to obey?
5. To increase understanding, try using different translations or versions of the Bible when reading a passage.
6. Use the devotions, written by staff and volunteers, as a starting point for your own journaling.

September 28, 2015

Read Matthew 16:13-28

17-19 Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

Jesus was all about building something here on this earth. Something that would be all about bringing "up there" (what's happening in heaven) "down here" (to this earth).

What was it? His CHURCH. Not a building, but a gathering of people who proclaimed what Peter proclaimed—that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior/Messiah of the world.

Jesus's vision for the church was grand. It would be established all over the world. It would push back the powers of hell. It would be like a light shining on a hill. It would be like salt, giving flavor and acting as a moral preservative in this world.

In Jesus's eyes, the church was the hope of the world. The church was His body on this earth. The church was to be His hands, feet, and voice after He ascended into heaven. He gave it authority and power (vs. 18-19).

The church gathers weekly to worship its Leader, Jesus, and receive His teaching. Failure to do so or thinking the gathering is unimportant is a colossal mistake. Too much is at stake.

Which is why we say, "BE here on the weekend." Gather with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Exalt the name of Jesus with others. Learn from gifted teachers. Encourage other family members.

And then scatter, go be the church. Shine light. Sprinkle salt. Bring what's happening up there down here.

That is how we change the world and fulfill God's calling (or purpose) for every Jesus follower.

Something to think about: HOW COMMITTED AM I TO GATHERING WITH OTHERS ON THE WEEKEND AT CROSSROADS? HAVE I CAUGHT JESUS'S VISION FOR WHAT THE CHURCH IS ALL ABOUT?

— Phil Print

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 16:24**

September 29, 2015

Read John 14

I don't know about you, but for me, obedience is not easy! At least that's the case when I'm the one having to be obedient and not the one calling the shots.

In John 14, Jesus is very clear about who is in charge -- He is obedient to the Father. Reading the Bible is how Christ-followers figure out what to be obedient TO (what you're probably doing right now!). However reading words is just the first part of being obedient. The next, and equally important, part is putting those words into action. When we read about giving generously to the poor, we really go do it. When we read about forgiving our neighbor, we actually forgive them. This is true obedience.

In John 14:15-23, Jesus tells us why obedience is such a big deal. He connects our obedience to our love for Him. He declares that our love for Him will give us a desire to be obedient. As we learn more about Him and fall deeper in love with Him, we will want nothing more than to be just like Him. The love of God inspires our obedience, not the other way around.

So let me ask you...

- What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- If you are being brutally honest, what areas of your life don't look much like Jesus?
- What is one thing you can do today to make your life look more like Jesus's life?

— Erik Anderson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 16:24**

September 30, 2015

Read John 15

I'm really bad at gardening, like seriously the worst. But even in my own feeble understanding of gardening, I think I understand this: dead branches don't produce fruit. Dead branches don't require pruning; they are cut off completely. As I read this chapter in John, something jumped out at me. It was this: Pruning is not only for branches, but also for people who are alive and producing fruit, seeking Jesus, connecting to Him, following Him, growing and changing.

So what kind of fruit should we be growing? Well...love is a fruit. Patience, kindness, gentleness, joy, faithfulness, goodness and self-control are all fruits (Galatians 5:22-23). These qualities are evident in people who are linked to Jesus, the vine. What others see is a reflection of what's going on inside of us.

As a Christ follower, others should see fruit in your life. If you are not seeing fruit in your life, maybe it's time to connect with Jesus. If you are in a season of pruning, it is because you are connecting to Jesus.

Know this, my friends, ***Jesus is not content letting you stay the way you are - He wants more for you.*** He wants the absolute best for your life! He cares for you and although the method may be painful and prickly, He is not okay with letting you stay where you are when He knows there is something more beautiful waiting. Look at what Jesus wants for you in this passage. He wants you to produce:

- even more fruit (v. 2)
- much fruit (v. 5 and 8)
- lasting fruit (v. 16; that He appointed you to do)

So if I may...let me ask you.

Is there evidence of fruit in your life?

What are some practical ways to stay connected and growing in a relationship with Jesus?

May God continue to grow us and prune us as we follow Him.

- Erik Anderson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 16:24**

October 1, 2015

Read Matthew 28

Last words. If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you say to your gathered friends and family members tonight? If you could leave them with one challenge, what would it be? Well, we know what Jesus's challenge was to us!

In Chapter 28, Matthew provides an overview of the time from Jesus's resurrection to his ascension into heaven. He reports in the first 17 verses that Jesus rose from the dead, he told his disciples to meet him in Galilee, and the tomb guards were bought off by the Jewish leaders to lie that Jesus's followers stole the body. Then in the last three verses (18-20), Jesus and the 11 disciples are together on a mountain where Jesus delivers his final directions, known as the Great Commission. These three verses give a singular goal for the Christian church until the time when Jesus returns.

You know the saying, "Something got lost in the translation." This passage is an example of that! In English there appear to be four command verbs in verses nineteen and twenty: go, make, baptize, and teach. However in the original language, Greek, there is only one command verb: make (from "make disciples"). The others (go, baptize and teach) modify "make disciples" telling the disciples how it should be done.

Jesus's command to the disciples is to make disciples! As they do, they will "go," "baptizing new believers" and "teaching them to obey all the commands I (Jesus) have given you." In Greek, "go" presumes you are going. You could even say, "As you are going to make disciples." Making disciples is a SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for all Christians.

As a Christian, I must first become a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is a follower who seeks to develop and live the character traits of the one he or she follows. To do this I must read the Bible to know who Jesus is and what He did. There is more. In other passages, the Bible tells us that as we seek to know Jesus, we will develop a personal relationship with him as well. As I do this, I am commanded to help others become disciples as well.

So...here are a few quick questions as we apply this:

1. Since I can't pass on something I don't have, am I a devoted follower of Jesus? Am I striving to become more and more like Him every day?
2. Am I intentionally helping others (whom I'm a little ahead of) get closer to Jesus? Am I investing in the life of someone who either doesn't know Jesus yet or is newer to the faith than I am?

That sounds like a tall order. How can I do that? Not to worry! The last sentence gives the solution. Jesus tells us he will be with us always and everywhere (to the ends of the earth). Together, with Christ, all Christians are supposed to make disciples. Let's get going - it's going to be exciting working with Jesus!

— Joe Dellaria

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This week's memory verse: **Matthew 16:24**

October 2, 2015

Read Acts 1

I'm going to assume you loved the television show *Dukes of Hazzard*. My brother and I were huge fans; reenacting the General Lee's moves on our bicycles, jumping through car windows any chance we got, and naming all our animals after characters on the show. The worst episodes, though, were those that ended with a cliff-hanger, and it happened so often. Those infamous three words "To Be Continued" guaranteed that we would have to wait a whole seven days to learn the fate of...?

Luke, the follower of Jesus, starts off the book of Acts (a sequel to the book of Luke) with Jesus dropping a cliffhanger. Jesus warns his crew in verse 4, "Hey, don't go anywhere because that big God thing I hinted about earlier is about to go down." He was talking about a game-changer: the Holy Spirit.

It wasn't a coincidence that Jesus's last words before the cliff-hanger-to-beat-all-cliff-hangers (the Ascension) were "When the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to do the impossible: Be God's representative in Jerusalem (i.e. at home), throughout Judea (i.e. the surrounding region), in Samaria (i.e. with the hated enemies next door) and to the ends of the world." Just as the General Lee required a 383 V8 to jump over Rosco P. Coltran's police cruiser, Jesus is saying that no human could pull-off what it takes to be a disciple without the power, guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

So if the marked differences between a person who believes in God and a modern day disciple is relying on the Holy Spirit, how do we start?

1. **Trust.** Be confident that if you have asked Jesus to forgive your sins and have professed a faith in God – the Holy Spirit is already accessible and has already been working in your life. He's just waiting to take you farther!
2. **Read.** The Holy Spirit is the one who makes Scripture make sense! God's words to us are delivered through the Bible. The Holy Spirit's job is to reveal what God is saying to you and how you can apply that understanding.
3. **Ask.** Try being in constant prayer. Unless you're in the habit, it sounds impossible, but silently praying and having a conversation with God during your everyday moments is how this disciple thing works! Start with a simple, "Holy Spirit give me wisdom, guide me, soften my heart, go before me..." You will come to a place of relying on the Holy Spirit so much you couldn't imagine life without Him.

The best part of accepting this amazing gift from Jesus? You will find yourself pulling off otherwise impossible leaps of faith the likes of those performed by the horn honking General Lee. Better yet? Much like our anticipation after a "To Be Continued," Jesus can't wait to watch!

— Marcy Baumann

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 16:24**

October 5, 2015

Read Colossians 1

We make a big deal about Jesus at Crossroads. In fact, the mission statement for the church says that we want "to change the world by becoming a movement of Jesus-like people doing Jesus-like stuff." Why do we say this? Why is Jesus so important that we want to orient our lives in His direction and seek to imitate His every action?

One author offers us an answer in this way:

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty and then for three years was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of those things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. Yet, I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever were built, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

In Colossians 1:15-20, the Apostle Paul gives us an other option for answering the question. He took several different angles as he wrote one of the most profound summaries of who Jesus really is and what He accomplished. Whereas the above quote focused on Jesus's humanity, Paul focused his description on Jesus's divinity. In these six verses, we get to see Jesus in relationship to God, to creation, and to His followers. We get to see that Jesus is a big deal because He...

- is God.
- is one with God.
- has always existed as God.
- created and is in charge of the universe.
- created everything we can see.
- created everything we can't see.
- is the reason for all existence.
- is the glue that holds the universe together.
- leads the church.
- blazed the trail of resurrection from the dead.
- is fully human and fully God.
- is a peacemaker.
- made the ultimate sacrifice.

In other words, at Crossroads (and as Christians), the reason we make a big deal about Jesus is because Jesus is a big deal!!!

Here are some questions to consider for how you see and follow Jesus. If Jesus is all that Paul described, should you seek to imitate Him? Do you? What is one thing you can change to start following Jesus more closely? Are you willing to do that?

— James Brown

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

This week's memory verse: ***Colossians 3:16***

October 6, 2015

Read Colossians 3:1-17

It is so common for people to live their lives as they see fit without any concern for their actions. I know that I have done things without any thought about what I was doing. As we act without thinking, we go down a violent spiral that brings us to being reckless. As we are reckless, we are living our lives as if we only have the life here on earth. However, verse 2 tells us “Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.” The things on earth are going to fade and what we have left in heaven is what is truly going to matter.

With that being said, the more reckless our behavior is in our earthly lives, the more we are being distracted from our relationship with Christ. Paul writes these verses to show us how we must turn away from our old lives, and live a new life with Christ. Verses 10 and 11, “Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like Him. In this new life, it doesn’t matter, if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave or free. Christ is all that matters and He lives in all of us.” No matter what our past holds, God loves us and is in us as we live this new life with Him. So often we dwell on the past and what we did wrong, instead of living the new life we have been given!

We have been called to live with Christ. We are called to live for Christ. The life we had before is like a different person. Our past is filled with mistakes, materials that don’t matter, and don’t deserve our focus. As we put Christ on, we are able to focus on so much more than what is here on earth. Now we can give God, who has given us eternal life, what He rightfully deserves – our complete focus.

What does this mean for you today? Living for Christ is a commitment...a complete life-changing commitment. Are you ready to:

- Honor this commitment?
- Have Christ be the center of your relationships?
- Honor Christ with your actions?

Along with all of this, no matter what is going on in your life at any point, you must give God thanks. Verse 17 says, “And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” You have a new life. Giving thanks is a must. Every choice you make is a choice between “putting on your new self” or not. What is one area where you are not wearing your “new self”? Will you seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to put on your new self? Call on God for strength. Tell a friend and ask them to pray for and encourage you.

— Paige Joosten

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Colossians 3:16***

October 7, 2015

Read 2 Chronicles 5

2 Chronicles describes King Solomon's decision to build a Temple to "honor the name of the Lord" (see 2 Chronicles 2:1). Solomon employed over 100,000 men to build this elaborate and ornate structure. One of the items brought into the Temple after it was built was called the Ark of the Covenant.

This Ark (or chest) was 4' x 2' x 2' and it was carried with the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. Symbolically, it contained the presence of God and was spoken of as the "throne of God." At one point it housed the tablets of stone the Ten Commandments were written on, a jar of manna, and other items.

What's important to note in this passage is the degree of reverence and respect the ancient Israelites had for God. From the construction of the Temple to its furnishings to what they did inside, everything pointed to the holiness of God...to the fact that God was set apart and to be worshipped above all.

They brought their best to God. Nothing was held back. No sacrifice was too great. God was their Creator and Deliverer. Which is why they took their worship so seriously. It's why they approached worship with awe and humility -- they believed they were in the presence of the Almighty God. It's why they sang out accompanied by instruments, "He is good! His faithful love endures forever!" (v. 13)

And God met them in their worship. Vs. 14 says they actually had to STOP their worship because the "glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple of God."

Wow! God was so present...so real...that the only proper response was silence.

Questions to think about:

1. As I gather with others on the weekend am I "prepared" to worship? Do I show up on time? Do I clear my mind? Do I focus on the words being sung or spoken?
2. Do I bring my best to God? Do I take weekend worship seriously? Is it my priority or is it something I do when the weather is bad or when I have nothing else on my calendar?

— Phil Print

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Colossians 3:16**

October 8, 2015

Read Ephesians 5:1-20

I often pray that the children in Crosswalk will see and experience God's love through our interactions with them. That they would model and follow our actions and genuine enthusiasm for Christ just as God has asked us to follow Him. It takes intentional moments to recognize that as a believer in Christ, our choices, attitudes and actions are a direct example and witness of Christ's love for the world.

Ephesians 5:1-21 offers instructions for the believers to walk with Christ. When we walk with Christ, we are walking to follow Him. The verses also highlight living in the light of Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit instead of filling ourselves with the multitude of things that this world teaches us are more important.

V 14: "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

When you become a believer, you are filled with the Holy Spirit. It's then your responsibility to be the example of what a follower of Christ looks like. There is action involved in this. In Verse 16, He is asking us to make the most of every opportunity and redeem the time because the days are evil. In Verse 17, He then asks us to not be foolish and to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

How do I know what God wants of me? I know I must continue to read the Bible, pray, be still and listen, then take action.

James 1:22-23 sums this up well: "But don't just listen to God's word. You must DO what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror."

- Are you glancing in the mirror at yourself and only willing to see how you want to see yourself? Or are you willing to really look in the mirror and see yourself as God sees you?
- Do you recognize yourself as a true follower? A true disciple of Christ? What does a disciple of Christ look like to you, to your neighbor, co-worker, friend, family? How are you going to use the light of God and be the example of Christ's love for the world?

— Sherry Sandvig

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Colossians 3:16***

October 9, 2015

Read Revelation 4

Have you ever experienced something so incredible that it took your breath away and left you searching for words?

I can still remember to this day my first visit to Disney World as a boy. The sights, sounds and anticipation of something amazing about to take place as my family walked to the gates of the Magic Kingdom. The crowds pressed in as laughter and joy filled the air. This is as close to heaven as a 10-year-old can get, and this is what 30 hours in a smelly car was building towards!

Mickey Mouse and his friends were welcoming guests and I recall standing in wonder before this iconic character, unable to speak as he pulled me in and patted me on the back and gave me a high-five.

I never wanted to leave.

I can only imagine this was a sliver of what John was experiencing in this very moment while imprisoned on the island of Patmos, when God gave him a glimpse of what this life was building toward.

The grandeur of Heaven and the throne of God.

We talk a fair deal about the attributes of God and His expressions of love towards us but what will it be like to actually stand before Him? What emotions will we feel? What sights and sounds will we experience? Will our limited vocabulary even begin to remotely describe the awesome wonder of our King?

John does the very best he can in describing the throne as one of pure light and radiance, over a backdrop of impressive color. The entire scene itself is full of great beauty and power, with every creature, big and small, worshiping God continuously amidst flashes of lighting and thunder. All reminders of who is worthy of our praise. If the heavens declare the glory of God, why shouldn't we join in?

It's God we seek. And while I love that He shows us grace and mercy on a daily basis, and His attributes are impressive, my heart is fully captivated by the One whom words cannot describe.

How about you?

— Eric Bemowski

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This week's memory verse: **Colossians 3:16**

October 12, 2015

Read Jeremiah 17:9-10 and Ephesians 4

Choices, we have to make them all the time. Often a choice to do one thing is also a choice not to do something else. The most important choice we make is whether we will do things God's way or our own way. We can only do one. Which will you choose?

Today's passages are from the Old (Jeremiah) and the New (Ephesians) Testaments. They share at least one parallel concept.

Both tell us all people suffer from the same condition. Namely, we are self-deceived. Jeremiah tells us, "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things," while Ephesians tells us our old self "is corrupted by lust and deception." Both are telling us people are naturally deceitful. Note that Jeremiah tells us our heart is "the most deceitful of all things" and desperately wicked." The NIV translates the last phrase as "beyond repair." This is permanent and can't be fixed.

Left to our own devices, you and I will deceive ourselves, sin, and not be able to tell. I know, it hurts to hear this news. But we all need to admit this so we can see our need for Jesus. If you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, you have a new nature. (If you have NOT trusted Jesus as your Savior, you only have one choice – to live by your broken, deceitful nature.)

Our old sinful nature and our new nature in Christ are like two shirts. The old nature shirt is dirty, ragged, and stinks (it has never been washed). The new nature shirt is spotless, always freshly pressed, and smells like a spring breeze.

All decisions, for your entire life, require a choice between wearing the old sinful nature or the new nature from Christ. If you put on the new nature, Ephesians tells us the Holy Spirit will "renew your thoughts and attitudes" which will help you become "truly righteous and holy." The Holy Spirit will help you know how to please God and help you do it. This brings peace, joy, and a deeper relationship with Jesus. Decisions made by the old sinful nature bring death and destruction (John 10:10).

I like a quote from James MacDonald, a preacher on the radio: "We grow in obedience, never perfectly, but always increasingly." While humans will never be perfect this side of heaven, we can all grow in our obedience to God through the Holy Spirit's strength, power and wisdom.

The question is, "Which nature will you put on?" Pick one area you know you are living by the old sinful nature, and start putting on your new nature in Christ. Share this with a friend, ask him/her to pray for you and hold you accountable. Then watch how the Holy Spirit will transform you!

— Joe Dellaria

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Romans 12:2***

October 13, 2015

Read Matthew 7:15-29

I am no homebuilder, but I do know your foundation is very important. Although many homes look alike on the outside, if the foundation is not solid, the same looking homes will not withstand the storm. This is very clear to me. What counts is what cannot be seen on the outside. That's what this passage tells me. The questions are: How solid is my foundation? And how solid is YOUR foundation?

As a Christian, I know I want a solid foundation as storms will come in life. Am I prepared fully for the storm ahead? How do I build a solid foundation? This passage tells us we need to do two things: 1) LISTEN to Jesus's teaching and 2) FOLLOW the teaching. In union with Christ, I am stable; His teaching is direct and authoritative. If I listen and follow His teaching, I can build a solid foundation that will weather any storm.

In contrast, a sinner builds his or her house on sand when they do one of three things: 1) they don't listen to Jesus's teaching at all, 2) they listen but don't follow, or 3) they try to follow without first listening. Those who don't listen or follow end up following a different set of instructions provided by the world. Listening but not following is also following the world's ways: to hear Jesus's teaching and not practice is not good enough. And frankly, trying to do what Jesus teaches without first hearing is impossible. We are told all of these approaches result in a sand foundation that will wash away in the storms of life.

What is my response as a Christian desiring to follow Jesus? The passage tells us it is using the tools I have already to build on rock. This begins with centering my life on Jesus, learning and following His teaching, and asking Him daily for what I need. In doing this I will be counting on God for His strength, wisdom and guidance. Then I can thank God daily for all He is doing in my life to build a rock-solid foundation.

The final question you and I need to deal with is: Am I seeking to learn Jesus's teaching and follow it? If not, what needs to change? Do I need to read the Bible to know what Jesus is calling me to do? Do I need to choose to follow Jesus's teaching I already know? Or, do I need to do both? Pick one thing today that you need to do to change or start so you will both LISTEN and FOLLOW. Pray and ask God to guide you and give you strength to act on this choice. Then watch how your foundation becomes more and more solid, just as Jesus promises in this passage.

— Lisa Renlund

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

This week's memory verse: ***Romans 12:2***

October 14, 2015

Read Psalm 119:97-120

Growing up, I attended a church where we weren't encouraged to read or own a Bible. And when the Scriptures were read and taught to us in church, they seemed very boring. So, it was a complete surprise to me when I began attending a church that helped me to see God's Word as alive and relevant today. God's Word is so encouraging to me, it shows me how to live my life, helps me to see where I'm messing up and gives me strength and wisdom.

But as I teach at every Bible class for kiddos, it doesn't do what it's supposed to if I don't open it up, if I don't make the time to read it. I cannot leave my letter from God on the shelf to collect dust; I must make time to sit down and open it up so that He can speak to me and teach me.

What's my takeaway? Make time for God and reading the Bible, so that I can be the best version of myself, so that I know how He wants me to live my life.

Father, would you please impress upon my heart to make time for you, like I make time for other things much less important? Help me to make You and reading Your Word a priority, Amen.

— Tina Wallace

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Romans 12:2***

October 15, 2015

Read James 3

1. God's way is always best.
2. True wisdom comes from God.

V. 13: *"If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom."*

V. 17-18: *"But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness."*

This summer I was asked to join an accountability group where I would work on one area of my life. As I prayed about what God would have me work on, I thought I didn't have anything major going on in my life that needed work. But through a series of events I realized that I had been fooling myself. In my job and from my friends, I've been told that I'm a good listener. But God convicted me that I needed to work on really listening — and thinking before words come out of my mouth. I have a habit of opening my mouth and talking over people without letting them finish. And, when I do hold my tongue, I can speak volumes with my facial expressions that let people know what I truly think. So I decided that my challenge in the accountability group would be to listen better and not interrupt with words or faces. All this was in the back of my mind when I sat down to write today's devotional. Turning to James, Chapter 3, the caption leapt off the page: Taming the Tongue. As I read God's word I knew what God was asking me to do — or, rather, not to do.

James wrote his letter to Christian believers to remind them, and us, of how our conversion to Christ should be reflected in our everyday lives. Yesterday, in my everyday life, someone in the hardware store bent over and grabbed the item I had just put down — the last one on the shelf. My first reaction was to make a smart remark and demand he put the item down so I could buy it. But before I could speak, the words of James came to me and I had the peace to humbly and wisely yield to the other person. (vs. 13 and 17) God's way was best.

God wants us to live our lives grounded in His wisdom. Only through wisdom can we live the honorable life He has for us (v 13). Reading His word, being part of a small group, and attending weekend services all help us to remain grounded in God's wisdom and reap a harvest of righteousness when we act in obedience. (v 18)

Do you believe God's way is best? Pick one area where you need to grow. Commit to working on that with God's help and see how He reveals His best plan for your life.

— Laurie Thrush

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Romans 12:2***

October 16, 2015

Read Romans 12

When I first read this chapter Paul wrote to the Romans, I admit I felt overwhelmed! Actually, really overwhelmed! How can I possibly live up to all of this?

When I take time to think about it, what I really need to be saying to myself is, “How can I NOT”? How can I not strive to live my life honoring Jesus in both my thoughts and actions? He’s clearly told me what it means to be a Christian through what Paul has written in the above verses.

Jesus did the hard work for me by dying for my sins so I can spend eternity in Heaven. Now He’s simply asking me to live my life honoring Him and reflecting His love in this fallen world. When I do, it is an act of worship! I become a living and holy sacrifice when I live my life with the intention of glorifying Jesus.

So what does that mean for me? I need to pray daily thanking Jesus for His grace and asking Him for His guidance in each new day. Remembering that I am not doing this alone; He is with me each step of every day.

I don’t know about you, but I feel less overwhelmed now!

— Juanita Hensel

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Romans 12:2***

October 19, 2015

Read Genesis 1:28-2:4

Genesis 1:1 declares *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* It’s impossible for us to comprehend the size of the universe that He created. Scientists say the number is literally astronomical: 280,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles! So let’s look at it another way: If the entire universe was represented by a globe the size of the earth, our entire solar system would be smaller than a grain of sand! Try to imagine how small we are in relation to that! In terms of the entire universe, each of us, right down to the number of hairs on our heads, is incredibly INSIGNIFICANT!

Let that concept sink into your mind for a moment! How depressing!

So from there, how do we get our minds around another concept — that we are “created in the image of God,” as Genesis 1:26-30 says? A God who is omni-everything – omnipresent (existing everywhere at once), omniscient (all knowing) and omnipotent (all powerful)? Thinking of ourselves as anything like God seems incomprehensible, just like imagining the size of the universe. And yet the Bible says that in addition to creating and managing the entire universe, God created us in His image and knows every detail of our existence. In God’s eyes, we are incredibly SIGNIFICANT!

Let THAT concept sink into your mind for a moment! How exhilarating!

The Good News for all of us is that Jesus came into the picture – fully Man (like us) and yet fully God! Jesus embodies the character of God in terms we can understand. He is the “image of God” that we were ingrained with, the perfect form of what God intended for us to be. When we strive to be “Jesus-like people doing Jesus-like stuff,” we’re holding Him up as the example we should emulate, full of love, mercy, compassion, humility, wisdom, holiness, and service. He’s the gold standard. Of course, we can’t achieve the perfect form of those attributes like Jesus did, but because He came, we can certainly get our minds around the concept of being “created in the image of God,” can’t we?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached that God even knows the number of hairs on your head (Luke 12:7). The number of hairs on your head! Even the things that are INSIGNIFICANT to us are still SIGNIFICANT to God! He knows us and loves us that much! Doesn’t that blow your mind!?

— Doug Smith

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **2 Corinthians 9:8**

October 20, 2015

Read Psalm 24

Almost every time we pray as a family, one of our boys will say, “Thank you for the whole wide world.” At first I thought it was simply cute. But the more they said it, the more I realized they were on to something. Even at 2 and 4, they have a deep appreciation for everything that God has created.

These boys see floating butterflies, galloping horses, and swimming ducks as gifts. They wonder at beautiful sunsets, rustling leaves, and miles of corn fields. And people — especially grandparents, teachers, and cousins — are the best of it all. Our boys treasure everything God made.

When we take time to enjoy and appreciate God’s creation, something else happens. We become grateful. For me personally, making gratitude a daily practice has made a difference in how I view everything. I can find something positive, a silver lining if you will, no matter the circumstance.

Full laundry hampers mean there are people to love in my home. Long days at church mean people are learning or meeting to grow their faith. Missing my mom reminds me that we had good times together. They might seem small or insignificant, but they all add up to something bigger.

Each good thing in my life reminds me how much I am loved by God. He created it all because of His love. For me. For you. For us. And He didn’t stop there. God couldn’t tolerate being disconnected from you or me. So He sent His only son to die for us. He made the sacrifice so we didn’t have to. No matter what I do or don’t do, someone loves me that much.

We all need a reminder that we are loved. That we are cherished. That we are forgiven. And every time you stop to be thankful, you can be reminded of it all.

Ask yourself this question: What am I especially grateful for today? It can be anything. And as you think about it and offer thanks, remember God’s love for you.

— Kelly Bosch

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **2 Corinthians 9:8**

October 21, 2015

Read Matthew 25:1-30

14-15 ...For the kingdom...is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability...

Do my gifts really make any difference at all? Sometimes I see the gifts and talents around me and I become intimidated. Instead of doing something, I do nothing at all. I begin to think that I am a one talent kind of person who makes no difference to God or anyone else.

Other times, I know that I have gifts and talents that God has given me but I am too afraid to offer them. I am afraid that I might offend or hurt someone. I am afraid that I might do more damage to the Kingdom of God than good. So, I dig a hole to bury my gifts, talents, and resources in.

Do you ever feel like a one talent kind of a person who has little or nothing to offer? Do you ever feel like you may do more damage than good to the kingdom of God if you attempt to use your gifts and talents? Do you ever bury your gifts and talents because of fear and doubt?

That is exactly what the man who received the one talent did. “But he who received one (talent) went and dug in the ground, and hid... So when his lord returned, the one talent man who buried his gift said Lord, I knew you to be a hard man... And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground.” (v. 18, 24-25)

The master said to this one talent kind of a person who hides, “You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered.” (v. 26) This one talent kind of a person “knew” his lord to be harsh and hard to please. Instead of offering something, he offers nothing. The man hid his one talent because of what he “knew” to be true about God.

What is it that you and I know to be true about God? If we believe God to be harsh or hard to please, we may never use the gifts and talents that He has given us. That is sin. If we know God is loving, merciful, forgiving, and kind, we will offer our gifts out of gratefulness.

If we want to be faithful servants, then we have to stop holding back. We have to stop thinking of ourselves as one talent kind of people who make no difference to God and others. We have to stop believing that God is harsh or hard to please. We need to believe and act on the truths that God has gifted every Christian with unique gifts, and He appoints us, just as He appointed the three servants, to build His Kingdom by using these gifts.

What gifts, talents, and resources has God given you? Pick one thing you can do with your gifts/talents. Use it for God’s kingdom as well as you can and know that God will use everything, even our imperfections, for our good and His glory, if we willingly offer our gifts in faith.

— Alicia Sliter

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **2 Corinthians 9:8**

October 22, 2015

Read Hebrews 13 and Philippians 4:18

Hebrews is one of my favorite books of the Bible. It explains very clearly how Jesus is the one and only path to a right relationship with God. While the Jews were looking to obey the law and perform ritualistic sacrifices to find God's favor, the author of Hebrews explains how Jesus made the final sacrifice, opening the way for us to come before God "with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace" (Heb. 4:16).

The author of Hebrews goes on to offer some amazing instruction on how to live as forgiven, grateful, sons and daughters of the most high God. Because Jesus made such a great sacrifice for us, it would make sense that we would want to give back to Him, in the form of praise and living a life of love and generosity to others.

Time and time again throughout the Bible, God says He is not looking for blind obedience to religious rules. While God did institute the original laws of animal and bread sacrifice, He makes it clear that He is ultimately looking for a heart humble before Him, willing to live in obedience, without selfishness. (1 Samuel 15:22, 1 Chronicles 21:24, Psalm 40:6, Psalm 51:16-17, Proverbs 15:8, Proverbs 21:3, Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, Ephesians 5:2, Romans 12:1) The point behind offering our first fruits was meant to keep our attitude about material possessions straight with God. To know that everything we have, and everything we are, were gifts and bought for a high price by our loving God and Father. To share these things is the sacrifice that causes God to smile on us.

So what is it that you will choose? Will you hold on tightly to your time, talent and material possessions, or will you offer them up as a pleasing and fragrant sacrifice to God, who has shown you grace and mercy and showered you with blessings?

— Marie Holst

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **2 Corinthians 9:8**

October 23, 2015

Read 2 Corinthians 9

I know nothing about farming. But, even with my limited knowledge, I understand what Paul is saying in these verses. It's crystal clear — if you want a big harvest, you have to plant a lot of seed!

No seed in the ground = no crops in the field. Any questions?

Paul's exhorting us to be generous. And he's wise enough to address our big issue when it comes to giving and being generous. Our issue is our limited seed. We have lots of bills, lots of debt, and lots of future expenditures staring us in the face. We don't have piles of seed lying around.

Our tendency, then, is to hold onto our scarce seed (money). Paul's saying DON'T. He's saying that would be as crazy as a farmer hanging on to his seed because he only has a little. Specifically, Paul's saying two things:

1. God is the seed-giver who always gives us enough to share (vs. 8).
Question: do I believe that?
2. Generosity begets blessing (vs. 6,8,10,11). The more seed you scatter, the more blessing (crop) you'll enjoy. And not only do you win but those in need win. And not only do you and others win, but God's name will get praised as well.

Our response? Verse 7. Make a decision in your heart how much you're going to give. Commit to a percentage. Set it aside. Give it cheerfully. Give it because you know that as you do, others are helped, God is honored, and your crop is increased.

Any questions?

— Phil Print

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **2 Corinthians 9:8**

October 26, 2015

Read Genesis 1:1-27 and Jude 1:1

How often have you heard the question being asked of a newborn baby, “Does he/she look more like the mother or the father?” By the time this little child becomes a teenager, we usually can declare, “you act just like your father or think like your mother!” Today’s passage asks us to reflect on what does it mean for us to be made in the image of God? Do we actually look like God? Obviously, God is a Spirit, and we have flesh and bones. But Jude describes some of the characteristics of one who has been made in the image of God.

Jude says that we are first “called.” This word means more than being called by a certain name, but communicates the concept of being called as in being invited to a banquet! What comes to my mind are the participation, the access, and the nearness that is experienced when sitting around a table. Jude then says we are “loved,” a word used throughout the New Testament to describe the intimate relationship between God and man. Finally Jude says we are “kept” by Jesus Christ, a unique word that describes being under the watchful care by Jesus.

So how do I look as one who is created in the image of God? Am I considering my prayers and Bible readings as a task to be done or as an opportunity to be in fellowship with a loving, caring heavenly Father who has me under His watchful care? May we praise God today that we have access and nearness to God because we were created in His image. When asked, “Who do I look like,” may it be said that I reflect the image of Jesus Christ!

— Philip Vierling

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical margin lines, text, or other markings on the page.

This week's memory verse: **Hebrews 10:21-22**

October 27, 2015

Read Genesis 3

Wow! How dangerous is doubt? Eve's doubt led to disobedience which changed all of human history. It seemingly came out of nowhere! She had no reason to doubt God; He had been so good to her, providing everything she needed. Then Eve found out there was something MORE — knowledge — and she wanted it.

There are times when it is good to listen to another's opinion, when it is wise to consider another point of view. There are also times when you should stick to what you KNOW to be true. And certainly there are times when doubt creeps in. This is when we can be swayed by the wily serpent, Satan. How can we know the difference?

For me, it is knowing, following and trusting God. If God says "Do this!" then I do. If God says "Don't do this!" then I don't.

This story is a great motivator for me to keep connected to God and His Word...

... so that I am sure and confident of what God has told us. (Eve started out well, saying "we can't eat from the tree in the center of the garden.")

... so that I do not misinform others or exaggerate God's direction ("we can't even touch it.")

... so that I am not swayed by doubt or caused to mistrust God's intention for my life (You're right! That fruit does look good! I wonder what else God is keeping from me?)

... so that I do not have to suffer the consequences that my disobedience will bring upon me, or others. ("God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die." Her disobedience broke her relationship with God and Adam.)

The Apostle Paul declared that "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day." (2 Timothy 1:12b, NIV) My prayer is that I also KNOW and TRUST God with my life, with His plan, with His teaching, and that my faith will stand strong in the face of temptation or doubt.

Do you compare your desired choices against God's Word? If not, what is keeping you from doing that? If it is a lack of Bible knowledge, what can you do to resolve that? Have you considered joining a small group, a Bible study, or talking with someone who knows the Bible well?

— Shellie Otto

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or general writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

This week's memory verse: **Hebrews 10:21-22**

October 28, 2015

Read Colossians 1:21-22 and James 4

Read these passages two or more times. Let them sink in.

Let's you and I have an honest moment. Have you ever felt dominated by something? Like it's ruling your life? Maybe it's your kid's sports practices, work project launch dates, or even our obsession with the latest "it" show on Netflix. Sometimes, things can take control of our lives without us consciously deciding to submit. Sometimes it's more serious than calendars or caffeine. Sometimes it's sin.

All of us have sinned. Do you ever feel controlled by your sin? Like you can't get out from it? I know I have. It feels like you don't have a choice in doing it, or like the guilt that you feel from it will never leave you. Have you been there? Where it feels like that verse in James is personally written to you on how we cheat on God with the shiny sinful things of this world?

Well, know this...you aren't alone. We have all felt that way, and in Colossians, Paul writes about Christ's answer to that.

Paul says that Christ, who has given us redemption and forgiveness of our sins, has rescued us from sin's control over us. He says that Christ has brought us into His Kingdom, under His protection.

Because of Christ's rescue, we no longer have to feel the weight of sin's dominion over us. We don't live in the bondage of sin anymore. We live in the freedom of God!

Reflect:

1. The only way to have our hearts changed to be more like God's is if we're honest with Him about what we struggle with. What do you feel has control over you?
2. What's one way that you can thank God for rescuing you from sin today?

Praying for you today as you seek God's face and redemptive freedom.

— Erik Anderson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Hebrews 10:21-22**

October 29, 2015

Read 1 Peter 5:1-7 and Hebrews 10:19-39

I love that the writer of Hebrews tells us that we can “boldly” enter “heaven’s Most Holy Place.” We are given permission to walk right in with complete confidence. Jesus’s blood has washed away all of our blemishes, we are clean, and we are able to go “right into the presence of God.” This is our home; this is where we belong.

If we believe what the Scriptures tell us, the last thing that should trip us up is doubt. But as you and I both know, it does. Doubt messes with our faith, it erodes our trust, and it lowers our confidence in things we should believe without hesitation. Our ability to “boldly” do anything disappears. Instead, we “try our hardest” or “hope for the best.”

So how do we combat doubt and boldly walk in faith?

It starts with reading the Scriptures for ourselves, and then choosing to believe what the Scriptures tell us. Because of His love for us, God first chose us. He loves us beyond all measure, and everything that we have is a gift from Him. We must also *choose* to believe that God is who He says He is and He always keeps His promises.

Over time, those choices will turn into beliefs that define who we are as individuals. As we strengthen our beliefs and apply them in our everyday lives, our faith will grow. As faith grows, so does our confidence and our ability to “boldly” go wherever God calls us.

So wherever you are called, go “boldly.” Go with confidence, go without doubt. Don’t try, just GO!

Can you think of one area where God is calling you to act right now? What is keeping you from choosing to trust God, believe, and act?

— Jim Faust

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings visible.

This week's memory verse: **Hebrews 10:21-22**

October 30, 2015

Read John 14:15-24 and Ephesians 1

After growing up in the church, attending services, and participating in youth group, I certainly learned about Jesus and loved Him from an early age. I spoke of my love for Him often and thought my participation in church activities was what Christianity was about.

John clearly states here that loving Jesus isn't simply speaking of it. Love actually motivates obedience to what He commands throughout the Scriptures. If you are like me, that can feel a bit overwhelming, and it would be, but John speaks of the Spirit of Truth that is given to us. This is the game changer.

So what or who is the Holy Spirit? How does it help me be obedient? It can seem like an abstract concept. We hear the words in church, but do we understand what it really is? Here's a simple illustration that has stuck with me. The Holy Spirit is like making chocolate milk. It is like squeezing chocolate syrup into a glass of milk. It's in there, but settled at the bottom, you don't see significant changes. However, stirring transforms the milk and chocolate syrup into chocolate milk. Adding the syrup and stirring the mixture is being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking with him. That's when my life is transformed.

This is the amazing thing. This passage tells us I have so much more when I love God. I will be obedient to Jesus's commands and have:

- the Holy Spirit who is given to me by God (v. 16),
- AND Jesus (v. 21),
- AND God's love (v. 23),
- AND Jesus and God will "come and make their home" with me (v. 23).

This idea of obedience motivated by our love for God becomes much easier when we become chocolate milk. Jesus is in us, the Father loves us, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to have God's heart to share with the world.

How does that happen?

- **Start each day acknowledging that you can't do this life on your own and ask the Holy Spirit to fill and empower you as you go through the day.** It truly makes a difference. It can transform how you love people and act towards others. It can bring interruptions that are for His glory.
- **Read His Word.** The book of Acts records how the Holy Spirit transformed ordinary men into those who loved God and lived in bold obedience that changed the world. It provides a road map for your life of obedience.

This is a life-changer. Love God, then you will:

Be filled,
Be obedient,
Be transformed,
Be chocolate milk!

— Stefanie Carlson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Hebrews 10:21-22**

November 2, 2015

Read Genesis 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8-14, and James 4:7-10

A few years ago, I landed in the ER three times in four months. During my last visit, nine doctors stopped in to interview me because I was such an unusual case (it doesn't take an M.D. to figure that out). Each interview ended the same way. I would inform the doctor I was going to Mayo in a month. All of them replied, "Oh, they will figure out what is wrong!"

Before you can treat an uncommon disease (which I had), you have to know what it is. That's what today's passages are about. The first two deliver the diagnosis and the last provides the treatment. If we get the diagnosis and treatment correct, then life is good. (I haven't had an event in nearly five years after getting diagnosed correctly!)

The Genesis and 1 Peter passages give the diagnosis. They tell us two important truths: **1)** Satan desires to control and devour Christians through sin, and **2)** Christians must be alert to recognize and stand firm against sin. In short, the diagnosis is that sin will kill you unless you diligently seek to avoid it.

The James passage provides several activities that when done together will cure sin in my life. This devotional could easily be several chapters long, but I want to focus on just a couple of points.

This passage follows what is sometimes called the "sandwich form." It begins and ends with the same idea (the bread) while presenting a new point in the middle (the meat). Verses 7 and 10 talk about humbling myself before God. This is the first step in overcoming sin. Sounds weird doesn't it? But humility is critical. That's when I admit God is greater than me and that His way is better than mine. If I can't get to that point, then I believe my way is better and I will continue in my sin. Pretty simple, but very profound.

Humility results in two things: **1)** When we are humble and resist the devil, he will flee (v. 7) and **2)** God will lift us up in honor when we humble ourselves (v. 10). God aids and blesses those who humble themselves before Him.

So, the question we all need to wrestle with is, "How can I humble myself?" I know it is not by relying on my own ability. I learned in week 2 (Jeremiah 17:9) that I am self-deceived. So who can help? The answer is my brothers and sisters in Christ. God has appointed them to lovingly help me grow spiritually. I must learn to rely on them to help me see when my pride is bubbling up. It is in Christian community where all Christians have their best shot at staying on track with God.

If you are not involved in a small community of Christians (roughly 2-12 people), what is keeping you from joining one? Pick one thing you can do to be in consistent Christian fellowship and do it. It is a matter of life and death!

— Joe Dellaria

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

November 3, 2015

Read John 10 and Jude 1:20-23

The context of John 10 has Jesus describing himself as the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep. I raise goats so I immediately get the illustration of Jesus being a good shepherd! I have good fencing, a barn for shelter, and a llama to guard them at night from thieves, especially ones that have four legs and howl! But Jesus says in verse 10 that he has not come just to protect us from these dangers but that we would have an abundant life.

Our second passage today from the book of Jude describes this abundant life. We are first to keep ourselves in the love of God, by building ourselves up in our faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, and waiting for the mercy of Jesus. This can be done by reading God's word, sharing our faith stories in a small group, asking God in our daily prayers to guide us through the Holy Spirit, and looking for the mercy and grace of Jesus in our daily activities. Being active within Crossroads enables us to do all these things.

However, Jude then tells us that we are to have mercy on those who doubt, save others by snatching them out of the fire, and show others mercy yet hating the stain of their garments. Huh? What is that all about? Let's first think about someone we know who has doubts about his or her faith or even has doubts about the existence of God. Jude tells us to show mercy to them, not to judge them. How do we save others by snatching them from the fire? Who do we know that is struggling with an addiction, or is involved in an improper relationship? We know if they continue doing this, they will get burned. Jude says we are to rescue them.

Jude's last instruction is to show mercy yet hating the stain of their garments. What does it mean to hate the stain of their garments? Some are living in sin, and we are warned not to love their lifestyle. But Jude's instruction is not to avoid them. We are to continue to show mercy to those not following the lifestyle of Jesus, yet cautioned not to become enamored by their lifestyle.

Wow, living the abundant life according to Jesus is something I can't do alone. This is the reason we need each other to be part of the "flock" as we live within our communities. Think of those who need to be shown mercy today and do it. Remember, sometimes you need others to walk alongside you in the pursuit of abundant living. Don't do it alone.

Are you working with other Christians to strengthen your relationship with Jesus? If you are not, find a way to start. You can join a small group or a Bible study, start meeting with another Christian to discuss a Bible passage, or get creative and find another way to connect with other Christians so you can go deeper with God. If you are doing some or all of these, then what is your next step for going deeper?

— Philip Vierling

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

November 4, 2015

Read Hebrews 3

Can we make it alone in life? Today more and more people experience loneliness in a crowd. We have become an individual-based society as opposed to a community-based society. Our families are smaller and the culture we live in encourages the “I can do it by myself” or “I do not need anybody’s help” attitude.

This passage in Hebrews, and others during this week, highlight the importance of belonging to a spiritual family. We need other Christians to make the journey of life successful. The main hindrance to a good and mutual relationship in Christ is SIN. Hebrews 3:13 mentions that sin is deceitful. Sin sometimes creeps up on us. The deceitfulness of sin “hardens” our hearts. We lose our sensitivity to God’s will and the urge for a closer relationship with God and instead accommodate more of our sinful nature. To avoid sin we must be active in pursuing righteousness. That is God’s “Do’s and Don’ts”.

We overcome sin through an accountability group of other believers who can help us see it coming and to avoid falling into its trap. If we already have fallen into its trap, we can get a helping hand out of trouble through the same community of believers.

The relationship with our spiritual family is important and needs to be nurtured “daily” as in verse 13. We cannot expect to have a healthy mutual relationship with our spiritual brothers and sisters by just meeting together at church on Sunday mornings. In the Christian fellowship that nurtured me during my early years as a Christian in Uganda, we had an excellent discipline of making sure that everyone belonged to a small group. The group would be made up of peers of the same gender. We made ourselves truly accountable by openly sharing our lives with one another. We also had a large selection of elders who made themselves available to us for guidance. Challenges were faced together. We became a mostly community-based society that minimized the individual space, unlike the traditional Western society. When we were rebuked, it was not misunderstood; we knew it was done in love. We grew up avoiding many pitfalls in life due to the guidance of our elders and our peers.

So we get back to the same question. Can we make it alone in life? I think the passage is quite clear about this. Sin breeds a hardness of heart or rebellion that leads to isolation and eventually spiritual death. Intentional accountability with other believers leads to victory over sin and ultimately a life that is pleasing to God. In this way we share in Christ.

Which do you prefer? Which will you choose to seek and participate in?

— Paul Musherure

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

November 5, 2015

Read 1 Thessalonians 5 and Hebrews 10:24-25

Our lives are filled with what sometimes feels like endless demands. It can become overwhelming. When it does, it is really easy to think about what we can get out of relationships. How can I be supported? How is this going to help me? What can this person/group do for me? Is my time away from [fill in the blank] worth it?

Community should add something positive to our lives. Sometimes it's happiness. Sometimes it's being heard. Sometimes it's a new way to look at something. But what we get from others is NOT all that relationships are about. A large component to community is what we offer in return. Are we willing to listen? Are we encouraging or validating? Are we being present? Are we checking in and making time for others?

When we approach things like small groups with a "me first" attitude, it's easy to check out or avoid ever getting involved in the first place. When it's all about us, we nitpick. We judge without hearing. We tend to only see the negative. If we don't grow or change to our preferences, we declare it unworthy of our time. Maybe even pointless.

But community — small groups — fellowship — is so much more! It's not worrying about meeting a new best friend. It's not rolling our eyes when someone asks a Christianity 101 question. It's not dismissing a viewpoint different from our own. As the verse in Thessalonians tells us, it's about being there for others.

Community is about meeting people where they are at and then encouraging them on their journey. It's saying, "That must be so hard." Or "Huh, that's new to me. I need to think about that." It's asking, "How are you doing today?" And "How can I help with that?" It's about being willing to sometimes give more than we receive.

Today, pray this simple prayer: Father God, show me one person or one group I can better encourage and support without expecting anything in return. Amen.

— Kelly Bosch

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

November 6, 2015

Read 2 Timothy 3

When I first began my walk with God, the Scriptures felt like a daunting task. I would begin to read a section of Scripture and suddenly I would feel overwhelmed by names, places, the meaning of sacrifices, rules, etc. Yet, I felt this need to be in the Word, to explore this God whom I called my Savior.

Each time I dove into Scripture I would feel lightness in my heart, a peace and assurance that God was and is always with me. Each time I walked away from Scripture I would feel distant, distracted and irritable.

Scripture became my lifeline.

These verses from 2 Timothy capture why reading and not reading Scripture made such a difference in my daily walk with Christ. It brought to my attention that the Bible is not just another book. It breathes new life into every individual's walk, just as it brought life into my walk. The words written on each page of the Scriptures are not just another fictional storybook; they are life.

Through the Scriptures we find the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We find His love, grace, compassion and a way of life that brings life not death to a broken world. We learn who Jesus was and is.

Paul tells us of the authority of Scripture in one short phrase "breathed out by God." It is clear in this passage that Paul does not refer to human authors, whom God chose to record His word, but clearly points to the Scriptures as words inspired by Christ Himself, God-breathed.

Our tendency is to look at Scripture and see "old fashioned" words and ideas that no longer seem relevant to our lives today. We become overwhelmed with names and the pure volume of Scripture. Yet each part of Scripture is important in our walk with God. This verse demonstrates the importance of the sufficiency of Scripture.

Paul is simply stating:

1. All Scripture is "breathed out by God."

Question: Do I read the Scriptures through the lens that All Scripture is breathed by God and brings life?

2. The truth in Scripture is sufficient and profitable in all things, doctrine and moral behavior.

Question: Do I believe every part of Scripture can guide my walk with God today?

— Anna Farrell

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

November 9, 2015

Read Philippians 2:1-18

My life sometimes seems to be stuck and chaotic at best. It happens easily in our busy world today — work, kids, significant others, getting in shape, eating right, etc. It's easy to think as an afterthought, "Oh, I should probably spend some time with my Creator and Savior if the day allows..."

Paul instructs us in these verses to take ownership of our spiritual life, work on it, and give our spiritual walk precedence. He goes on to state that we should be awed by this gift of personally knowing the Creator of the universe through Christ.

What happens to any relationship or activity when we don't prioritize it? Spouses turn into roommates or worse. Good health turns into ever increasing elastic waistbands in our wardrobes. As our relationship with God wanes, so do our souls -- the strength to face obstacles and storms, our ability to love and put others ahead of ourselves.

Life doesn't function well when we neglect what matters most. It's easy to let urgent items of day-to-day life become a priority over our spiritual needs. Jesus made time and a relationship with God a priority. He consistently got away from everything and everyone when He needed to spend time with His Father (Luke 5:16). If God Incarnate needed that time, why wouldn't we?

The good news is even if we've drifted 10,000 miles away, it's only one step back to God, who's pursuing you...closely. He's given us instructions on working with others, loving our spouses, raising our kids, handling money, and so on. We need time in His Word and with Him to learn His ways. By doing so, I find my life has more of a balance. Daily life becomes predominantly more joyful and peaceful when Christ comes first.

My sensitivity to others' needs increases because my needs are so completely met in Jesus. Now I want to put my spouse's needs ahead of my own. Even though I'm tired, I can give my kids an encouraging word they need. Monetary anxiety lessens because God's promised to meet my needs (Phil. 4:4-7). There's extra strength to say "no" to a second doughnut because I know God loves and takes pleasure in me. I have worth, having been purchased with a great price.

Paul adds in verse 13 that God will strengthen you. God doesn't leave it totally up to us to make everything happen. However, He does want to be first in our lives (Matt. 6:25-34). God wants you to grow and be successful in His purposes for your life.

So, make the time during the day to be alone with God. Fight for it! Read His Word...savor and digest it. Don't starve your spirit.

Poet Carl Sandburg wrote "it is necessary now and then for a (person to be alone)...sit on a rock in the forest and ask, 'who am I, where have I been, and where am I going.'" When you believe it's essential, really get away and be alone with God. Start discovering what the Creator of the universe has in store for you.

It's a daily choice to meet with God through prayer and reading His Word. What's keeping you from doing either? Is there one thing you can do or change today to meet with Him?

— Ed Cole

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This week's memory verse: ***Philippians 2:12d-13***

November 10, 2015

Read 2 Peter 1:1-4

For almost a decade, everything Saturday Night Live alum Adam Sandler did was gold as he perfected the “adult-child” role. In the movie “Big Daddy”, Sandler’s mischievous character, Sonny, teaches his son how to have fun injuring rollerbladers by tossing tree branches on the path in front of them just as they come careening down a hill. Hilarity ensues as they successfully wipe out several in a row.

Here’s my question to you: Do you ever feel like our enemy does the same thing to us just as we think we’re finding our groove following Jesus?

In fact, I think few branches have the power to wipe us out like the branch of comparison where instead of keeping our eyes on Jesus, we start looking to the sides. We take notice of others around us and compare what God is doing in their lives to our own. And what often happens next?

Crash.

Insecurities rise. Doubts creep in. Jealousy takes root. Envy gives way to bitterness as we desire the gifts that God has placed in someone else. We begin to think if only we had someone else’s personality, charisma, wisdom or experience, then maybe we could be more effective. This is the kind of thinking that so often trips us up from our calling.

And this is exactly what makes God’s promise here so powerful.

You have a calling on your life and God has already given you everything you need to live out a life of faith. This means you lack nothing, no matter how often you think you do.

God has given you gifts that simply need to be nurtured. He has given you His strength, or as Peter writes, His divine power, to walk away from sin. He has given you the invitation to join Him in what He is already doing in this world to reach the lost and grow fully mature disciples.

You lack absolutely nothing because you have everything you need in Him.

So if we’re being honest:

- In what ways have you taken your eyes off Jesus lately?
- Where have you felt the need to compare?
- In what ways have you felt insufficient to live a life set apart for Him?

Read 2 Peter 1:3-4 one more time. Do you recognize that you already have all you need at your fingertips? This is God’s promise to you, and a promise is only as good as the reliability of the person making it. And God’s track record is pure gold.

— Eric Bemowski

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Philippians 2:12d-13***

November 11, 2015

Read 2 Peter 1:5-21

Having coached my kids in soccer for over 15 years, I fully appreciate a famous quote from Vince Lombardi: “A coach’s job is to get players to do things they don’t want to do, so they can do the things they do want to do (i.e. win games).” That is exactly what Peter is doing in this passage. The entire chapter “coaches” individuals in the church on how to grow spiritually.

As we look at the passage, let’s work backwards. The rewards you and I get from spiritual growth are strength to endure struggles on earth and an eventual “grand entrance” into heaven (v. 11). Sounds pretty good doesn’t it? So what do you and I need to do to obtain this?

Verse 10 commands all men and women to work hard at doing these things. This is for all Christians. It means, if you don’t do it, no one is going to do it for you. It is your personal responsibility to pursue spiritual growth as a Christian.

Next, we come to a contrast between those who follow these commands and those who do not. Christians who continue to grow spiritually become increasingly productive and useful for God’s kingdom. Statements like this always imply the opposite; if you don’t grow spiritually, you will become an unproductive and useless Christian. The next verse (9), emphasizes that point. It tells us we will be blind and forget our sins are forgiven, meaning we will live with sapping guilt and won’t be able to find our way out.

Now we move up to verses five through seven. Here Peter starts out challenging us to take God’s promises seriously. He tells us to “make every effort.” Without going into gory detail, he is saying “pull out the stops, do everything you can without quitting.” Let’s pretend someone hid a one million dollar check in the place you live and told you, “It’s yours if you can find it.” I don’t know about you, but I would check every square inch to find that check. That’s how we should pursue growth as a Christian.

Finally, we learn what seven qualities a healthy Christian’s faith should be growing in:

- generous moral excellence
- knowledge
- self control
- patient endurance
- godliness
- brotherly affection
- love

The only remaining question is, “Will you choose to grow spiritually?” What is one thing that is keeping you from growing spiritually? After figuring that out, what will it take to change that one thing? Now “make every effort” to do it. That sounds like a lot (and it IS!). That’s why you need to read the first part of verse three, “By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.” God has given you what you need to do this and He will help you do it. So let’s “Just Do it!”

— Joe Dellaria

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Philippians 2:12d-13***

November 12, 2015

Read Hebrews 12

Once upon a time, I was on the cross country team in high school and the non-fairytale version of my story is — I loved it! I loved the community and the sound of in-sync feet on the pavement. I loved the common goal of finishing a race and I even loved the cold meets (the colder the better). But, when I was on my own or when it was “off season”, I discovered an ugly truth about myself: I was okay with giving up. I was honestly more likely to walk for ten minutes alone or take a shortcut when no one was around. I found myself training half-heartedly, ten sit-ups here and a few reps on the weights turned into a “should, but ...” statement in my brain.

Looking back on that season of my life, I can see the negative ripples my short-cuts caused. I wasn’t doing my best, which hurt my race time, which hurt my finish placement, which hurt the whole team’s score. Everything I did had a ripple effect that touched so much more than myself. The same can be said about my spiritual journey. Am I taking “a new, stronger grip” on my quiet times or am I letting the days trickle by with my Bible untouched? Both of those options leave a ripple around those I interact with.

The way I challenged myself by staying with the pack during cross country is important still. Am I surrounding myself with people who take their faith seriously? Or will I find shortcuts and walk along the road alone? That’s not who I want to be. I want to take Hebrews 12:12-13 seriously. I want to get “a firm grip” on my walk with Jesus and DO something with it because the way I train matters.

What about you? Who in your life is touched by the ripples of your walk with God? Are those ripples refreshing and encouraging or are they weak and disheartening? Is the path you are training on going straight toward growing closer to Jesus or is it winding and distracted by the people you meet? Cast aside those “should, but...” statements and take “a new firm grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees.” Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong. What you do with Jesus matters to you and those around you!

— Danielle Campbell

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Philippians 2:12d-13***

November 13, 2015

Read Matthew 13

When my daughter Gianna was born, she weighed just over 8 pounds. Although I did not really have an opinion about this number, it seemed like everyone else definitely did. In fact, when she had lost 1.5 pounds a few days after her birth, all the doctors and nurses got really serious. Her weight was all we talked about until she started gaining again.

What I didn't know at the time was that there is an actual medical diagnosis for a baby who is not growing or developing. When a baby isn't able to gain weight or grow physically, the doctor will write the letters "F.T.T." on the baby's medical chart. These letters stand for "Failure To Thrive."

When we are born, thriving is what we are supposed to do. When that does not happen, it is serious business, because it is literally a matter of life and death. Once the F.T.T. diagnosis is given, the doctors go to great lengths to identify the problem and then remove the barriers to growth.

So, after Gianna initially lost 1.5 pounds, we made sure she was eating all the time. During that period, we counted every calorie, the doctors watched her like a hawk, and everyone partied for every pound gained.

Interestingly, God has not only designed us to thrive physically, but spiritually as well. Unfortunately, it is also possible for us to experience an F.T.T. diagnosis when we fail to grow in our spiritual lives. In those moments, it is important for us to examine our hearts and identify any possible barriers to growth.

When we experience spiritual F.T.T., the prescription that Jesus gives us does not come in the form of a pill, but rather, a parable. In this story about seeds and soils, Jesus gives us some significant tools to self-diagnose. He identifies three obstacles for growth (lack of understanding, lack of devotion, and lack of focus) and then paints a powerful picture of what can happen in our lives when they are eliminated. Those who seek understanding, are devoted to following Jesus, and focus intently on that end will yield 30-100 times what was invested.

Lord, please help me to identify the barriers that are blocking my growth and causing any failure to thrive. Please give me eyes to see these obstacles, and then, the courage to remove them! Amen.

— James Brown

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***Philippians 2:12d-13***

November 16, 2015

Read Proverbs 3

Are you waiting until tomorrow to help?

What struck me about this verse is that God makes it clear I should not wait until tomorrow to help my neighbor. Or people should be my priority. Right? I had a situation recently when someone said to me, "Sorry, I am just too busy." There is so much going on in our lives that it is often too easy to say that.

What I hear God saying is, "Helping people should be my priority NOW, when I CAN do it." I feel like we all have the "power" to lift someone up or make him or her feel loved. Even if it is something quick, it really makes a difference. It can be as simple as picking up the phone to call someone who is lonely. Do you have even five minutes to make someone feel loved? Are you too busy to send a quick note saying, "Thinking of you"? Really, are you that busy?

I also have to remember, "tomorrow" may be too late. If you have the power to help someone before it is too late, wouldn't you want to?

I feel like I should be able to help people. God has given me so much. What am I doing with the gifts God gave me? Am I sharing them with my neighbors? When I do, I truly LOVE my neighbors. It is easy to do. Give it a try.

Call on the Holy Spirit to help you see people around you who need your help. You and I have the power to help others, even if we do not think so. Don't wait until tomorrow, help someone today. Do you have five minutes?

— Melody Bonneson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***John 15:8***

November 17, 2015

Read Matthew 14

Do you ever feel like you don't have anything to offer? Maybe you want to change the world, make it a better place to be or tell more people about Jesus, but you feel inadequate? Compared with those you see on TV or in the media who have power and influence, you feel less than qualified?

Well what did this young boy bring to Jesus? What did he have in his hands? Yep, just two fish and five loaves of bread. Pretty slim pickings for a crowd of 5,000 hungry people! Yet look what Jesus did. He took what this boy had and multiplied it to feed, bless and care for all 5,000 in the crowd! There were even leftovers! Jesus took what this young boy had and did something incredible.

So in your world, what is it you want to accomplish? What is God calling you to do? What is your purpose on this planet? Now consider how will you get that done, accomplish your mission and be everything God is calling you to be. Start by looking at what is "in your hands". You probably won't find two fish and five loaves of bread, but you will find something: a talent, gift, strength, resource or passion that uniquely qualifies you to do exactly what God is calling you to do right now.

To change the world and be who God is calling you to be, you don't need to have vast resources or abilities. You don't even need much at all. The key is to take what God has given you, offer it up to Jesus and let Him multiply it to meet the big need He intends you to meet. Like the young boy in the story, you simply need to open your hands and use what God has given you!

What is there? What is in your hands? Take a look right now. Write down three gifts, talents or resources you have that God can use. How will you use them this week to make this world a little more like heaven? How will you use them to help one more person? Today trust that God has given you exactly what you need to do what He's calling you to do. And trust Him to multiply what you have to meet a bigger need. Then you'll experience how exciting it is to act in faith!

— Jake Kerschner

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***John 15:8***

November 18, 2015

Read Luke 10

Almost everyone knows the Parable of the Good Samaritan, right? Great story, but if we think the parable is just teaching us to be good people, doing kind things for others, we're missing a much more important point!

Jesus told this parable in response to a Jewish lawyer, who had asked Him, "Teacher, what shall I DO to inherit eternal life?" DO is the key operating word there; hold that in mind. At Jesus's prompting, the lawyer relates that the law of Moses says to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus tells him he's right, "Do this and you shall live." But the lawyer, not yet satisfied with that answer, asks "Who is my neighbor?" And that's when Jesus launches into the parable.

Notice the subtle twist as Jesus finishes the story! He doesn't directly repeat the lawyer's question, "Who is MY neighbor?" Instead, He asks "Who is the neighbor to THE ONE WHO IS LYING THERE?" The lawyer responds, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus says, "Yes, now go and do the same."

On the surface, it seems Jesus is saying that we earn our way to eternal life by loving God and being a good person, avoiding the big sins and helping others whenever we can. Seems like that should be good enough, right? We've all told ourselves or heard other people say, "I'm basically a good person, but I'm not perfect. I've made a lot of mistakes." And we take comfort picturing ourselves as the Good Samaritan in the parable: "I've done some good things to help other people. God will honor that."

BUT, what Jesus was teaching in the parable is actually quite a bit different! There is nothing we can DO to inherit eternal life on our own. We can never be good enough to get in! Jesus knew this, and He wanted the lawyer (and others who were present) to figure it out as well. You see, in the parable, you and I aren't the Good Samaritan, we're the man who was beaten and left half-dead on the side of the road! We're the ones who need to be saved, and we can't save ourselves! The law, represented by the priest and temple worker passing by, can't save us! But Jesus did for us what the Samaritan did for the man on the side of the road: He showed compassion, soothed our wounds, lifted us up and paid the full price for our redemption - while requiring us to do nothing but receive His gift!

You see, "Who is MY neighbor?" and "Who is the neighbor to THE ONE WHO IS LYING THERE?" are really the same question. And they have the same answer: Jesus is my neighbor, the one who showed me mercy, and I am the one who was beaten and lying on the road, unable to save myself. When Jesus says, "Yes, now go and do the same," He's basically saying "I've paid the full price for your redemption. Now in gratitude, go and show mercy to others."

Puts the parable in a whole new perspective, doesn't it?

— Doug Smith

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***John 15:8***

November 19, 2015

Read Ephesians 2

How many of you are rule followers? I tend to be in that category. I like to earn the things I get and be able to point to the reasons — the list — of what I did to earn them.

Here's the unique thing about Christianity: getting the relationship right with God is not about presenting God a list of how we have earned that good relationship, or the credentials we have achieved to please Him. The Bible teaches us that everything on the list has already been checked off by Jesus! All we have to do is have faith in what He has already done.

Jesus accomplished that by the power of His grace, not just for our salvation to begin the relationship, but so that good works will accompany the new relationship. Our works have even been pre-arranged by Him; all we have to do is say, "Yes, I'll do that!" So even though good works don't save us, good works should be a natural outflow over the course of our lives.

What is even more exciting about this relationship (and you'd think as a musician I'd grasp this more naturally) is that the good that God has prepared for us to do is not a "list" — it is a piece of art! This passage says that not only has God saved us by His good work, free to us through our faith, but that we are his masterpiece work of art: His poems, His paintings, His songs. The good works we do are quite literally His "brush strokes" and "notes"! All we need to do is have faith and allow ourselves to be His instruments. While He is doing this, He is expressing His art throughout the universe, and together we form something beautiful. The world in chaos, hurt, discord and emptiness desperately needs to be filled with God's art and His masterfully crafted song.

For me, it means figuring out what resonates with me, and not being too scared to reach out to those around me. It means inviting my neighbor over for coffee. It means offering to babysit someone's kid so they can have a much-needed break. It's opening my eyes to the needs around me and constantly asking myself, "How can I help them?"

- What good work "resonates" with your heart?
- How can you allow this "note" to happen? Is there an action you need to take to join, sign-up or act on the good thing God is calling you to do?

— Gwen Budish

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: *John 15:8*

November 20, 2015

Read John 15:5-8, 16 and Hosea 14

Have you ever stopped yourself in life's busy tracks and found yourself empty and disconnected, like you are in a rut and not the best version of yourself? And have you noticed how this directly correlates with your spiritual life and how much time you are spending in the Word, in worship, and in quiet time with Jesus?

These things absolutely go hand in hand! Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." When we are joined together with Christ by prayer, devotion and quiet moments together, we become close, connected friends. In turn, we ourselves bear fruit! We model a life after Christ because we are joined to Him. No longer are we selfish and discontented. We are seeking God's will with a grateful heart, finding:

- joy in His presence,
- peace in His unwavering provision,
- patience in His timing,
- and hope in His plans for our future!

We can share our heart with Jesus when we feel this connection to Him, and we can ask Him anything and trust He is listening and moving.

We will begin to handle our relationships and tasks throughout the day with patience, kindness and self-control because of this connection. Separated from Jesus and an intimate relationship with him, we can't truly produce fruit. We become "broken off branches that end up in the brush pile", and we lose our light!

Let's plug into Jesus the moment we rise, and attach ourselves to the Vine, our source of strength and nourishment! Jesus promises fruit will be abundant, and our actions and words will spill Jesus into the lives of others, and He will be glorified!

What is keeping you from plugging into Jesus? What one thing can you do to "plug in" more consistently?

— Amanda McGrane

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: ***John 15:8***

November 23, 2015

Read Nehemiah 1

Think back to when you first moved out of your parents' house or perhaps left home for an extended period of time. Then your family comes to visit for a long weekend and you begin to catch up. Only rather than the "same old, same old" or "so-and-so's having a baby" and "the Andersons just re-did their basement," you hear this: "Well, things are not good. Everyone you knew growing up is either dead or wishes they were dead. Your hometown is in complete chaos. Our police force has been destroyed and the whole city is in despair."

Your heart would break, right?

This is the backdrop of where we find Nehemiah. He has just received word that the wall protecting Jerusalem, his hometown, was broken down and the gates destroyed by fire. The people he loves – his fellow Israelites with whom he and his family have history – are in "great trouble and disgrace." Things are bad, really bad.

Now check out Nehemiah's compassionate response for his people. Even though he is 800 miles away, safely and comfortably out of harm's way, testing wine and food for the King's table, just knowing that his people are hurting wrecks him. The Bible tells us that when Nehemiah hears this news he weeps and mourns for days. For Nehemiah, it doesn't matter that his people and his home are far away, knowing they are without protection has him fasting and praying on their behalf. He doesn't just feel bad about the situation but he does something in response.

We, like Nehemiah, are faced with a choice. Locally, regionally and globally, there are people that are in "great trouble and disgrace". Many of us are probably broken and bothered by the injustices and pain of the world (poverty, homelessness, child trafficking, orphans, etc.), but how many of us choose to take the next step and prayerfully look for ways to improve the situation? I'm all too guilty of ignoring the homeless person on the street all because I'm rushing home to get my groceries in the fridge. Or hearing about the child without water in Africa but not acting because his problems seem so far away.

Has there ever been a time when you almost missed an opportunity to act because you were caught up in your own anxiety or pain? Is there a person or a cause you feel God nudging you to do more for? Let us not only be a church that has hearts that break over what breaks God's heart, but people that are willing to act on that compassion. Together we can change the world with God's help.

— Michelle Jacobson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 25:40**

November 24, 2015

Read 2 Corinthians 8

Giving comes in a million shapes and sizes. In verse 5, this passage tells us it's a privilege to give.

I think it's easy to get caught up in the thought process of "not enough." I don't have enough money, I don't have enough time, I don't have enough talent, I don't have enough (fill in the blank)... We all have those moments; we all feel that "woe is me" mentality at some point.

But the truth is, every single one of us is fighting a battle. We are all experiencing various tests and troubles. We can't waste time comparing our troubles with each other. We need to give our troubles to God. We need to give our gifts and our talents to Him as well. When we faithfully give, we are blessed in ways beyond measure.

What you have to offer is important. What you have to give is always going to be more than enough. Whether it's a hug, an hour to serve, or a simple donation, it's all equally needed and equally important.

Make it your privilege to give. You have a gift. And giving in any way is a gift worth sharing.

We will always be wishing for more; the key is to find happiness and gratitude for what we have because it is in fact always enough.

Here are some questions I consider when deciding how I want to give. See if these will help you decide what it looks like to "give like a Macedonian."

1. What are you being called to give? Your time? Your talent? Your treasure (money)?
2. How can we remember to find gratitude for what we have?
3. How can we find joy in the midst of troubles?

— Sarah Keys

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 25:40**

November 25, 2015

Read Deuteronomy 10

A bit of background on this passage: Moses is leading the rebellious Israelites through the desert to the Promised Land. God has given them the Ten Commandments, but now, He has given Moses a new message for the Israelites.

V. 19 *“So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.”*

What stands out immediately to me is the word “foreigner”. I am a foreigner. Literally. I have lived 45 years of my life as a foreigner, living in four different countries and speaking with what everyone else calls an “accent”.

Pronouncing words differently. Having a “foreign” name. Unfamiliar with local expressions and sometimes customs (such as the custom of holding a grad party for your high school senior...by inviting people to sit in your garage and eat cake). This all being said, though, I never felt ignored, uncared for or unloved. I did not feel like a foreigner and was not made to feel like one.

Unfortunately, this isn’t the case for many others.

Another definition of foreigner is: a person not belonging to a particular place or group; a stranger or outsider. How many people do we know who probably feel like this? How many people either feel like a foreigner or are made to feel like a foreigner? How many people do we not realize feel like one?

Jesus call us all to “love one another” and “love our neighbor.” Here God clearly tells us that we must also love the foreigners. We must reach out and help these brothers and sisters who need our help, whether they be those in our community, elsewhere in the country or globally.

We must welcome them, as God welcomes us.

We must care for them, as God cares for us.

We must provide for them, as God has provided for us.

We must not let them feel like foreigners, as God does not let us feel like foreigners in His presence.

We must love, as He loves us.

Do you know a “foreigner” who needs to be welcomed or helped? If not, ask God to show you one and provide what they need. If you do know a “foreigner” with needs, are you reaching out with Jesus’s love to care for them? If not, ask God to show you how you can help. Then listen and do as He guides you.

— Elspeth Atkinson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 25:40**

November 26, 2015

Read 1 Timothy 6

Finances can be a great challenge to many of us. Earlier in the chapter, Paul addressed those wanting to be rich. He finishes the chapter addressing those who actually are. We're obviously not wealthy so we can totally skip over this, right? Can we, though? Wealth is relative. Someone like Bill Gates wouldn't think I'm wealthy, but 90% of the world would. So no, we can't skip over this.

There are a few things we can learn from these closing verses. First, trust in God and not money. Before working for Crossroads Church, I was unemployed and was consumed by "making a living" and finding a well-paying job. I had a mortgage and bills to pay! Instead of trusting God, I put my trust in money. I didn't realize I had been unemployed for almost a year and still had everything I needed. God had been taking care of me the entire time. I was blinded by my trust and focus on money. After realizing that, I left it all in God's hands and truly experienced what it meant to trust God. It wasn't easy, but God always showed up in the craziest ways.

Verse 18 tells us to use our money to do good. We should "be rich in good works and generous to those in need." How do we start doing this? Tithing is one easy way to start. Let me tell you about my personal experience. As soon as I started working at Crossroads, I made it my personal goal to tithe 10% right off the top. It felt great! Keep in mind, I was working part time and still wasn't making enough to pay my bills, but God provided. I did notice a pattern: when I gave, He gave back to me! I went full time and I knew I was going to have to increase the amount I gave to keep my personal goal of 10%. That's when it became scary to give "that much," but I went for it! To this day, God has given me what I need and I've learned to really enjoy what He gives me. That's another thing we can learn from these verses. ENJOY what God gives us. It may not seem like much, but to 90% of the world, it's a lot more than they will ever have.

We need to employ what God has given us. To me this doesn't necessarily mean giving money. Some of you may not have a job, making it difficult to give financially. You do have time, though. We all have time. If we don't have time, it's our own fault. When I didn't have a job, I gave my time away. I volunteered every weekend and weekdays when I could. That was my way of employing what God had given me. I encourage you to set a goal and leave the rest to God! You will not regret it!

So what is one thing you could do today to "be rich in good works and generous to those in need?" Are you willing to take a step in faith and see how God will work with you to accomplish His will?

— Irvin Segura

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 25:40**

November 27, 2015

Read Matthew 25:31-46

This is the first passage in the Bible where I felt God speaking directly to me. I was 10 years old, sitting in Sunday School class. I had read the assigned passage (somewhere else in Matthew), and the class was moving onto the next activity. I wasn't interested, so I kept reading and came to this passage. My heart raced when I read where Jesus said He cared so much for the hungry and lonely and naked and sick! If He cared about people that much, then He must care about me too! And if Jesus cared that much about the hurting people of the world, then I wanted to follow Him, joining Him in helping the hurting people of the world. That day my faith became real. Life wasn't about just me, it was about God's love for the entire world, including the lost and the lonely.

This passage was so right that I was surprised when later on in life I would hear people caution against it, saying it isn't what we do that makes us right with God, that it's faith alone. True, but they were missing the point of the passage. The way I see it, if I believe in Jesus and what He's done to make us right with God, then I want to get to know Him, and that leads to loving Him. And if I love Him, I will want to do what He says (after all, He said "If you love me, obey my commandments" John 14:15). And slowly I will learn to see people the way He sees people and feel their pain the way He does. And this passage where He talks about easing the pain of others increasingly burns in my heart.

So what do we do with this passage? Who are the people He talks about? This question haunted me while growing up in a middle-class neighborhood. Once I got established with a job, I was able to donate money to different charities, which is good. As well, a portion of my taxes pay for food and housing assistance for others, which is good as well. However God didn't say we can outsource our compassion. He wants us to see and serve people face-to-face, because it gives them dignity and it changes us.

About ten years ago, a pastor challenged a couple of us to go find people to serve. Not knowing where to go, we headed to downtown St. Paul to talk to people living on the street to find out what they needed. On subsequent weeks we loaded backpacks (and then minivans) with the things people said they needed. Weeks became months and then years. These trips have continued in a variety of forms for 10 years, and many faithful people have joined us for years at a time. Now I am not saying this for pats on the back; I am telling you this to encourage you to find a way of serving face-to-face, because it changes everyone involved for the better!

So look around and ask yourself, who are the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned? Then go introduce yourself, and prepare for your heart to break and to soften and to grow.

— Matthew Atkinson

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Matthew 25:40**

November 30, 2015

Read Acts 4:1-22 and John 14:6

Do you remember your college days? Reading these three verses over and over took me back to my college days when in one of my classes, we discussed religion, the afterlife, and inner peace. I actually dig hearing what mumbo jumbo people follow. I realize we are all seeking truth. However, fake “truth” is still fake, even if it gives you warm fuzzies. When I listen to what others believe, it often creates the opportunity to share God’s truth – the one and only truth!

I love the words of Jesus in the Book of John. He makes it very clear that salvation is found in Him and in Him alone. Peter also proclaims the same truth in verse 12 of the Acts passage.

Jesus made salvation possible for you and for me! Jesus was without sin. He died on the cross and took our sins upon himself as the only acceptable payment for all sin (past, present, and future). If we turn to Christ, repent of our sin, and trust that Jesus’s death paid for those sins, then we can have forgiveness. This isn’t a forgiveness that takes time to obtain. It’s instantaneous – the moment we say and believe this, we are freed of sin and have eternal salvation.

In no other name is there salvation – only in Jesus Christ!

Are you thinking, “How do I get salvation?” Ask God for it. Do you feel guilt? That’s your sin. Want forgiveness? Ask God for forgiveness and trust that Jesus’s death is sufficient to pay for your sins! Once you do this, it says in Psalm 103:12, “He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.”

For me this is something I can’t just keep to myself. Like Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations...” Share the truth with others so they too can know salvation that only comes in Jesus Christ!

What is keeping you from sharing this “Good News”? Decide today, what is one step you can take to start sharing. Ask God for help – then watch for the opportunity and be bold like Peter! Jesus gave this job to all of His followers.

— Kristin Myre

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Mark 16:15**

December 1, 2015

Read Acts 1:8 and Mark 13

In a world much like ours today, the people of the Bible often sought to be in higher social positions than they actually were. They sought to be generals in the military, the highest priest in their town's synagogues, or even the next king. Today we seek to get the next promotion, we want to be in charge, and we want to have power. We are no different from the disciples of Jesus, but Jesus promised THEM the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

We too are promised that same power. It is the same power that raised Christ from the grave. But Jesus didn't promise us power to be better than our neighbor; Jesus tells us that we are given the power of the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses in our homes (Jerusalem), our communities (Judea), our country (Samaria) and the world.

It may seem at times, though, that being a Christian is harder than life before we believed. Living out our faith often brings more trials than we expect. It can cause tension between a mother who believes in Jesus and a son who does not. It can cause awkward relations between co-workers. It can cause wars between nations. The Bible doesn't say that being a Christian will be easy; in fact it tells us the opposite. In Mark 13:9-11, Jesus warns us of persecution or trials that we will face as believers. When we proclaim Jesus in the streets of our communities, we will be brought before councils as radicals. When we demand Biblical justice from our government, we will be condemned by non-believers. When we tell the world about Jesus, we will be hated for His name's sake. But Jesus gave us encouragement to face these trials.

For we are given a greater power to show the love of Jesus to our neighbors, our children's teachers, the mail carrier, and our own family. We are given a greater power to change the eternities of strangers. We are given a greater power so that we can stand before earthly leaders to tell them about true justice, grace and mercy. We are given a greater power so that we do not fear those who hate us for our faith in Jesus, but instead continue to show them unconditional love. We are given a greater power to endure persecution in all of its forms. Because in Mark 13:11, we are told that through the Holy Spirit's power in us, we are able to endure and see our gift of eternity.

— Autumn Young

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Mark 16:15**

December 2, 2015

Read Mark 16

There is an island in the Bay of Bengal called North Sentinel Island. An indigenous group of people live there and have been virtually untouched by the outside world. Several attempts have been made to contact the tribe, but each time outsiders are met with spears and javelins! They are very hostile to foreigners! Not much else is known about them and recently the Indian government created a three mile exclusion zone around the island so no one bothers them and no one gets killed! To the best of everyone's knowledge, this tribe has never heard of Jesus.

Jesus tells his followers in Mark 16, to "go into all the world" and tell people about his "Good News". If there is one thing we are to do, it is this. Our mission in life, our purpose on this planet, is to go and tell everyone everywhere about the good news of Jesus Christ. This means somebody has got to go to North Sentinel Island. Not me, of course, but somebody has to! And somebody has to walk next door to your neighbor's house and make sure they have heard about Jesus. And somebody has to talk to your co-worker about the Good News. And somebody has to make sure your workout partner at the gym has heard about all of this. You get the idea. You may not be called to go to North Sentinel Island to talk about Jesus (pray for that poor guy), but you have been called to tell those you know.

So who is that for you? Who in your life or in your circle needs to hear about Jesus? Do you have the courage to talk to them? Don't worry, you don't need to be a Bible expert or possess a theology degree. You simply need to tell what you know. Tell them what Jesus has done in your life. Tell them about your relationship with the Creator of the universe. Just say something! To get you started, write down three names of people who you are pretty sure need to hear about Jesus. For today, just write them down. Begin praying for them and ask God for opportunities to talk with them about your faith and about your Jesus. And while you're at it, throw up a prayer for those North Sentinelese.

— Jake Kerschner

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Mark 16:15**

December 3, 2015

Read Matthew 7:1-14

Ever entered a store through the motion activated doublewide Exit doors? Truth be told, I have done it more than once. It's easy. You walk up and, bam, the door opens. In you go. No problem, right? Next to these doors is the approved entry. It is a single door that you can open yourself. In a sense, that is what today's passage is about - the wide and easy versus the narrow and hard doors. Which will you choose and which will most choose?

Matthew Chapter 7 records Jesus's final teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon taught his followers how to be His disciples and live God-pleasing lives. Our passage, verses 13-14, contrasts the broad highway that leads to a wide and easy gate with the difficult road leading to a narrow gate. Using picture language, Jesus tells us three things. First, those who follow the easy way, prompted by their sinful nature, will spend eternity in hell. Second, those who choose the difficult road of living by the Spirit and pleasing God will spend eternity in heaven. Finally, the passage tells us few will find the narrow gate.

Why are we bringing this up when the topic we're talking about is sharing Jesus with others? There are two good reasons. First, you must know whether you have chosen the difficult road leading to the narrow gate. It is like putting your oxygen mask on first when an airplane loses cabin pressure. If you have not, you will not be able to help others. If you are not sure whether you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, talk to a pastor or a strong Christian to clear that up and make the commitment.

The second reason we are bringing this up, is the sad truth that many will follow the broad highway leading to the wide gate of eternity in hell. If you are a follower of Christ, this should break your heart. (Does it?) In addition, this provides strategic insight on how to share Jesus with others.

Since few will find the narrow gate, we can expect that few people will respond by trusting Jesus as their Savior. This doesn't mean to not bother sharing because it is hopeless. What it tells us is to share wisely. We should share with anyone who is open to listening. If a person is not interested in listening, continue to pray for them, and check back with them later. Then move on to others who might respond positively. This is about being wise with your time and energy versus dealing with a broken heart for those who do not trust Jesus as their Savior.

So are you sharing Jesus with friends, family or others God brings into your life? If not, pray that God will lead you to someone who needs to hear about Jesus. If you are doing this, great! Keep up the good work to which Jesus has called us!

— Joe Dellaria

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Mark 16:15**

December 4, 2015

Read 2 Timothy 1

I was on Facebook a few months ago when I saw something that caught my attention. A picture popped into the feed of a mountain-man-looking-human-being who appeared to be dancing around a small flame. It reminded me of the scene from the movie "Castaway", both from the beard and the scene where Tom Hanks's character was able to first start a fire on the island where he was stuck.

Upon further investigation of the Facebook picture, I discovered that this grizzled humanity was my friend Josh and he had just completed the last requirement to receive his wilderness survival certification. All he had to do to get it was start a fire from scratch, and when he finally did, he expressed his excitement with a primal celebratory jig.

Fortunately, starting a fire does not always need to be that dramatic. All that is really required is the proper materials and some solid skills. A great campfire starts with some wood shavings at the bottom. Then add some kindling and some dry wood piled up just right. Once you ensure that everything has been set up with proper airflow, it is time for the power source: my preferred one is a match! All that is left to do is sit back and watch it burn, baby, burn!

Interesting, discovering our God-given skills and abilities takes a similar kind of careful attention. Once your gifts from God are identified, He wants us to ignite them by putting them into action. This is why the Apostle Paul exhorts his protégé, Timothy, to "fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you" (2 Timothy 1:6).

When we let God work through us for His purposes, He gives us the power to use our gifts in supernatural ways. The exciting news is that the fire God ignites in us (when we know and use our gifts) cannot be contained like a campfire can. Paul tells Timothy to be bold in using his gifts because "God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but (rather) of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

God's desire is to give us the boldness to fan our flame into a roaring bonfire whose light pierces the darkness and can be seen from miles away (see Matthew 5:14-16).

Questions to consider:

- What are my spiritual gifts? What am I good at? What am I passionate about?
- Am I fanning the flames of the spiritual gift God gave me? What is holding me back?
- What would I do for God if I knew that I could not fail? Am I willing to be this bold?

— James Brown

[illegible]

This week's memory verse: **Mark 16:15**